

## K13e02\_Prasad\_translated\_en

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Welcome to the teaching unit on Toxic Feminisms. I hope that in this unit students will understand the concept of Toxic Feminism, but also understand the concept of femonationalism, that they will see the colonial continuities of this argumentation, that they will recognize anti-Muslim racisms in these discourses, especially in feminist discourses, that they will recognize and get to know individual actors in the debate, and that they will be able to develop ideas about how to prevent toxic feminist argumentation.

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When I talk about Toxic Feminisms, which is a problematic feminist tradition, there are many different terms to name this tradition. One would be just "white feminisms," of course white is not about a skin color, it's about a social positioning. Some call them monosectional feminisms. Some say they're feminisms in colonial feminist traditions. Some say they are racist feminisms. Sara Farris speaks of femonationalism, I will explain this terminology in a moment. Gabriele Dietze speaks of ethnosexism and I have often referred to these forms of feminism as hegemonic feminisms. These are all different terminologies, but they all describe Toxic Feminisms and, above all, with a focus on German realities.

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What all these feminist traditions have in common is, or are, they see gender above all as the only category, and thus as the "master category." That is, the idea is actually women are above all victims, not only in sexism, but simply in society as a whole. We know from history that perpetration by women in systems of domination in the past, for example colonialism or the Holocaust, is documented. So we know that women were not only "accomplices" but active perpetrators, both in colonialism, also in the Holocaust and also in the present. If we look at racist discourses, for example, if we look at Beate Zschäpe as she is a woman, we know what she did, that is, and she is also more than an accomplice. So we know that perpetration by women very much happens in other systems of domination. But in Toxic Feminism this is more or less neglected, because it is important to hold on to the idea that women are first of all only victims.

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It's interesting that culturalization plays a very, very important role - I'll explain what that is in a moment - but only of some forms of violence. And it always does so by stereotyping the communities in which this form of violence occurs. Villa/Hark speak of the intertwining of feminist and anti-sexist positions with culturally essentialist racisms. And these are all commonalities that unfortunately play a role in all problematic feminist traditions.

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A very, very important point in this whole debate is anti-Muslim racism. Here I quote Yasemin Shooman, who says, quote, "The category of gender plays a central role in anti-Muslim racist discourses. The topos of the oppressed Muslim woman goes hand in hand with the stereotype of the misogynistic Muslim man. In anti-Muslim racism, sexism is declared to be a cultural trait of Islam that people marked as Muslim cannot escape. Cultural traits are thus naturalized in racist discourses by attributing them to all people of a culturally defined group, thus implicitly pointing to a collective character." End of quote.

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What I think becomes very clear here is that in all these Toxic Feminisms there is a special focus on the so-called "Others", really in big quotation marks. These so-called "Others" are those who are either Muslims or are declared to be Muslims. And everything that this group does is always explained in terms of their supposed or actual origins as Muslims or Muslim women.

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That is, everything they do is culturalized, and culturalization is about defining a behavior or any behavior as a cultural imprint. But it is interesting that this only happens in the context of deviant behavior of the constructed Other. That is, first, it only happens when the so-called "Others," that is, the constructed Others, do something that I perceive as deviant. At the moment when someone does something that is completely normal, perhaps even very desirable, it rarely happens that this behavior is culturalized. But when someone does something that is not desired, then it is often culturalized and, as I said, always only with the so-called "Others". The fact that culturalization of behavior is something that only happens to the supposed "Others" makes it discriminatory in itself, because it is a treatment that, for example, the dominant society or members of the dominant society do not experience.

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At the same time, ethnicized people are denied any individuality and that makes it very difficult, especially in research work, for example, to recognize migration- or milieu-specific aspects. That is to say, the thesis is actually that when culturalization is applied, i.e. when I have the idea that someone behaves in this way because he or she has a certain origin and this origin shapes this person in this way, I don't really see anything else anymore, i.e. the cultural lens blocks the view, so to speak, of other aspects that can certainly be migration- and/or milieu-specific or also individual.

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There is a whole range of topics, feminist topics that is, that contribute to anti-Muslim racism. It's the whole set of topics of forced marriage, intimate partner killings, female and male circumcision, bans on burqas, bans on headscarves, bans on minarets, women's swim (a time for only women to enter the pool), and many more. This list, and this is the sad thing, is getting longer and longer every year, because there are always new topics coming in, where a few years ago I would have thought, my God, women's swim is really harmless, but obviously even women's swimming is not harmless, if it is Muslim women who claim women's swimming for themselves. That is, the list of these issues is getting very, very long. I will only focus on the issue of partner killing later today.

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What do I mean by colonial continuities? All this is just not new. It seems as if it were new. But all of this is not new, it is something that has been negotiated over and over again in colonialism for a long time. The first point is that women's rights are used as currency to civilize the so-called "others. That is, the moment I want to evaluate the "others" about whether they are "civilized" enough, they have to prove it by making it clear how they respect or do not respect women's rights. This is something that is not new, but has already played a role in colonialism.

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An important point is precisely this "unveiling" of the "Others". This is a motive that played a major role in colonialism. Later on, I will discuss the headscarf debate in Germany. That is, this idea that the West must come to "unveil the oppressed Muslim woman", all in big quotation marks, is actually an idea that is very old, but has reached into the present.

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The same applies to the over-focusing on the violent "Other". That means actually looking at who the perpetrator of violence is - and if the perpetrator of violence belongs to a so-called "other" group, that there is an over-focusing that goes hand in hand with an, almost an ignorance or a social acceptance of violence by native born men (evtl. misleading in diesem Kontext? Mit "in-group" / "we-group" / men of Germanic descent übersetzen? Einheimisch können ja auch in Deutschland geborene Muslim\*innen sein?).

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This also means that forms of violence in the majority society are neglected. And there are often double standards, and I think we can illustrate this with the example of the headscarf debate. The CDU already has "Christian" in its name, a Christian party that is very much in favor of allowing Christian religious symbols and clothing, but at the same time is in favor of banning headscarves. That's interesting, because either I'm for the free exercise of religion, then please for everybody, or I'm not, then for nobody. But to really apply a double standard, to say that we are for freedom of religion, we are actually for a lot of religion in society, just not for this one particular religion - that's where it gets problematic.

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What is meant by all this is that, from my point of view, a core of colonial thinking becomes visible, which Aram Ziai has summarized very well. I quote, the core of colonial thinking is "the denial of equal rights on the grounds that the others are simply not as rational as we are, but are backward, underdeveloped or uncivilized. In other words, colonial thinking allows us to propagate equal rights for all in the post-colonial era on the one hand, but on the other hand to find good reasons why some people are more equal than others after all and why the latter should not get the same rights after all." End of quote.

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I would also like to illustrate this with the example of the headscarf ban. Feminists worldwide, I assume, would agree to say that there are certain basic postulates, e.g. that we do not want the state to interfere in what women's bodies have to wear or take off. So there's always this idea that the state should stay away from the female body, that we should be able to decide for ourselves what we put on or take off. I think that's a feminist postulate that applies internationally. But then it is interesting that there are organizations in Germany, feminist organizations, which would perhaps even sign this postulate, but make an exception in the case of the headscarf ban, because they are of the opinion that the "other women", in this case the Muslim women, are not yet so far advanced, they are underdeveloped, uncivilized and therefore they are in favor of headscarf bans.

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But now let's move on to the term femonationalism. Here I quote Sara Farris, who says,

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quote, "Femonationalism refers both to the exploitation of feminist issues by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Muslim campaigns and to the involvement of some feminists and femocrats in stigmatizing Muslim men under the banner of gender justice." End quote.

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What does she mean by that? She means that, for example, let's say the AfD party, which is definitely a very nationalistic party that is otherwise not at all interested in gender issues, so women or equality is not an issue for them at all, but they pick up on that only in the context of the so-called "Others," that they say it's important to empower Muslim girls and women - I don't think they use the word empower - but to empower them because they live in patriarchal societies. It is quite interesting, because otherwise they are not interested in patriarchy at all, not even in gender issues in the majority society, i.e. only in connection with the Muslim "Others". At the same time, there are femocrats, that is feminists or self-proclaimed feminists, who contribute with their politics to the advancement of anti-Muslim racism and that they actually enter into coalitions, of course not consciously, i.e. unintentional coalitions, with right-wing parties in order to promote certain issues. Examples of femocrats in Germany are the organization Terre des Femmes, the magazine Emma, but also people like Seyran Ates or Necla Kelek, the latter as a key witness. That is, both of them are very interesting figures - by the way, these figures exist in every Western European country in this discourse - they are both from Turkish families, I think even guest worker families, and both of them get a credibility from that that others don't have. That is, they argue very problematically against Turkish communities or Muslim communities, and femocrats like to pick up on this and say that these are key witnesses, so if they say it, it must be true. That is a very exciting role in this whole theater.

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On Toxic Feminism, I'd like to share an example with you here. This is the magazine Emma - I guess you all know it. This paper or this cover is before the first New Year's Eve, this is interesting, it says, "We help refugees. But women's rights must not fall by the wayside." That is, there is an idea that when refugees come, that women's rights fall by the wayside. That is, there is also this idea, they also don't understand anything about women's rights, but also a threat to the inner woman, who then says, oh God, when refugees come, my women's rights are gone. A very interesting assertion, which I think was very succinctly addressed by Hark and Villa as follows: "Among those who accepted the Cologne VIP invitation to redraw the social boundary lines, who perhaps even belonged to those who extended this invitation, must be counted not only publicists such as Birgit Kelle and Harald Martenstein as well as politicians such as Frauke Petry, Beatrix von Storch or Horst Seehofer, but also Emma editor Alice Schwarzer." End of quote.

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The interesting thing is, and this first New Year's Eve in Cologne shows a great deal, because it gives the impression that we have become a feminist nation overnight. Because something very, very interesting happened. Women reported that they had experienced sexualized violence. For the first time, they were believed. That is, for the first time - the police chief, I think went to the media at that time, actively asked women to report, they were assured that they would be taken seriously. And the whole society, the whole nation suddenly talked

about sexual violence. The alleged perpetrators were vigorously investigated. But we know there was no conviction for sexual violence, which is no surprise. It was at night, it was dark, it was loud. It will be difficult to sift out individual perpetrators and then prosecute them properly. And yet there was an amendment to Section 177 of the Criminal Code. That, too, is actually very interesting, because that was a feminist demand long before the first New Year's Eve, when there were gaps in the penal code, including gaps in human rights, by the way, and the politicians, the German politicians, kept claiming that we didn't need this amendment to the penal code. After the first New Year's Eve, this change in criminal law was made very, very quickly - that was also a very problematic development, but that's how it was. At the same time, and this is the bitter part, not only was Section 177 of the Criminal Code amended, but at the same time it became much easier to deport convicted sex offenders. In other words, the impression is created here that the right of asylum or a right of asylum is the appropriate remedy against sexualized violence. That doesn't really make any sense. But that was actually one of the results of the first New Year's Eve.

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The second example I would like to share with you is a campaign that Terre de Femmes is currently running. It's called "Keep your head clear!: for a headscarf ban for girls". There it is claimed: "the veiling", that is, as I said, headscarf veiling, of girls of all ages - "an increasing phenomenon in many schools and even in kindergartens". No source is cited. "We want girls to grow up without headscarves and without full-face veils - in our country and elsewhere." An interesting fantasy, so in our country, but elsewhere means around the world - a very colonialist fantasy that we can decide here what should happen around the world. "They should be free from health risks due to light and vitamin D deficiency, general developmental disorders due to lack of exercise." That is, here it is claimed that a headscarf is a health risk because of light and vitamin D deficiency and general developmental disorders due to lack of movement, as I said, here too there is no proof. As far as I know, there is a proof only for this, I mean in Israel there have been investigations among ultraorthodox women who have indeed covered their heads for years, but not only covered their heads, but also covered their arms, legs and moreover lived in very cramped apartments, there and - have had very many children - in this combination there is a proof for a vitamin D deficiency, but not for a headscarf ban or for the use of headscarves among girls.

So here, assertions are made that are problematic. But there are other gaps in the logic: We all, and indeed all people who live in Germany, because Germany has ratified the Civil Pact, have a right, a human right to religious freedom, not only Christians. The parental right to live a religion and to pass it on to the children is a right, again also for all people, not only for Christians. The right to freedom of religion, and this is important, also explicitly includes the wearing of specific clothing and headgear. This means that if we look at human rights, it is highly problematic to say that we have freedom of religion, but it should not apply to one group. That is contrary to human rights. Even Christianity has some regulations that only apply to certain genders - nothing happens there, not even from Terre de Femmes. And even if I imagine, that is the claim of Terre de Femmes, that these girls are forced to wear headscarves - certainly there will be girls like that - but do we really want to make it difficult for these girls to have their right to education? Because we know that especially in the

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problematic families this does not lead to the girls not wearing headscarves, it rather leads to the girls either being taken to another country or to private schools where it would not be a problem. That is, even if I assume that all, well hopefully nobody assumes that, but even if I assume that all are forced, it would mean that I am making it more difficult for these girls to have their right to education. That can't really be the purpose of this exercise.

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All of these actors - I've only given you two examples, Terre de Femmes and Emma - are unintentionally very close to right-wing movements. We know that 10 to 15 percent of Emma's followers come from the environment of right-wing accounts, that's a study from 2018. In the first half of 2018, 43 percent of the tweets with a link to Emma.de came from the right-wing spectrum. I think you have to take a very close look at that. Among the followers of Terre de Femmes, right-wing accounts made up around 5 percent.

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Haaf, in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, asks whether this might not be a right-wing liberal version of feminism.

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So much for the problematic ideas of feminisms or Toxic Feminisms. But there are also intersectional feminist traditions and they also have core elements and I would slowly come to the end with that. So here it is really about first of all a critical examination of isms and their interweavings, i.e. to actually not only look at sexism, but also at sexism in intersection with racism, with ableism, with classism, etc., i.e. to actually look at which isms work together here, and not as majority discrimination, but really interwoven, i.e. intersectional. At the same time, with intersectional feminism, it is very, very important to recognize the postcolonial continuities, to address them. And - and this is perhaps the most difficult exercise - actively unlearning some images. After all, it's very easy to learn something. But it is very difficult to unlearn something. And in this context, unlearning is what is called for. Hark/Villa plead for a "politics of location" instead of a universalistic speaker position. That is, it is really a matter of considering what my own positioning is, in what social climate I find myself, who says what and where? In other words, to really take a very, very close look at the positioning and only to express oneself in connection with the position or the linguistic position through an examination of it.

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In Germany there are - I started with the problematic traditions - but there are also other traditions, feminist traditions, which are unfortunately not half as much present in the media, not half as well known, so I would like to end with them. You see here FEMOCO, Feminisms of Color 2013, that's the logo of a conference that took place in Berlin in 2013. Feminisms of Color, a conference exclusively for feminists of color, Jewish feminists, Black feminists, Muslim feminists, really feminists who always think racism and sexism together. Some call their tradition a postcolonial/decolonial feminist tradition, they were also at FEMOCO. Some say intersectional feminisms, some talk about Black feminisms. We have in Germany, for example, the organization Adefra, Afro-German Women in Germany. They have been working for 30 years in the Women of Color feminisms complex. All of these groups were just at FEMOCO as well. But the bitter thing is that all these groups have no

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funded organization. That is, there is no office, no place - but there are many actors who have contributed for more than 30 years to the fact that feminisms in Germany remain non-toxic.

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Thank you very much. And here you can see the literature references.